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FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0460
INFO USIA WASHDC 5512
ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
AMCONSUL DHAHRAN
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 04267

ALSO FOR POLAD
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E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR

TAGS: PREL PGOV KU IZ

SUBJECT: KUWAITIS CALM, CONFIDENT, AND UNIFIED (FOR THE
MOMENT) IN THE FACE OF IRAQI THREATS

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. FOLLOWING MUBARAK'S MEDIATION BLITZ THROUGH BAGHDAD, KUWAIT, AND JEDDAH JULY 24, THE KUWAITI PUBLIC IS CALM AND CONFIDENT THAT TENSION BETWEEN KUWAIT AND IRAQ WILL EASE OFF. SOURCES INDICATE THAT KUWAITIS, WHILE CONCERNED ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF ARMED CONFLICT, HAVE TAKEN SADDAM'S BLUSTER IN STRIDE AND ARE HOPEFUL THAT MEDIATION EFFORTS WILL PRODUCE A SETTLEMENT, IF ONLY TEMPORARY, TO THE IMMEDIATE CRISIS. KUWAIT'S CABINET REFLECTED THIS MOOD IN A CAREFULLY WORDED STATEMENT JULY 22 CALLING FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF THE CRISIS WITHIN AN ARAB FRAMEWORK. EVEN THOSE KUWAITIS WHO HAVE EXPRESSED OPPOSITION TO THE GOK'S RECENT POLITICAL TACTICS CONTINUE LINING UP TO EXPRESS SUPPORT FOR THE LEADERSHIP. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFFS JULY 24, A WELL-INFORMED AL-SABAH SOURCE ASSERTED THAT ALL HOPES FOR AVERTING ARMED CONFLICT NOW REST ON MUBARAK. (NOTE: CONVERSATION WAS HELD BEFORE THE JULY 25 ANNOUNCEMENT THAT KUWAIT-IRAQ TALKS WOULD BEGIN SOON IN JEDDAH.) WHEN ASKED IF HE FELT SADDAM MIGHT RESORT TO FORCE, THE SOURCE SAID MOST KUWAITIS, HIMSELF INCLUDED, THOUGHT IT HIGHLY POSSIBLE. THE FUROR OVER OIL POLICY WAS CLEARLY ONLY A PRETEXT FOR SADDAM TO TAKE WHAT HE HAS ALWAYS WANTED - WARBA AND BUBIYAN ISLANDS AND, PERHAPS, THE RUMAILAH OIL FIELDS ON THE KUWAITI SIDE OF THE BORDER. ONLY FAST DIPLOMATIC ACTION WOULD SAVE THE DAY.

¶3. (C) THE SOURCE EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT SHAIKH SABAH, THE FOREIGN MINISTER, WOULD BE ABLE TO PULL THIS OFF THROUGH THE EGYPTIANS, THE SAUDIS, AND OTHERS. HE CLAIMED THAT THE IRAQI PRESS HAD LAUNCHED PERSONAL ATTACKS ON SABAH, BECAUSE "SADDAM KNOWS HE HAS THE CAPABILITY TO CHECK HIS EVERY MOVE. IF ANYTHING, THOSE ATTACKS ARE AN INDIRECT COMPLIMENT TO SHAIKH SABAH'S ABILITIES." SADDAM'S BLATANT ATTEMPT AT TRYING TO DIVIDE THE AL-SABAH FAMILY AND TO PIT THE KUWAITI POLITICAL OPPOSITION AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT WERE "LAUGHABLE." WHEREAS SHAIKH SABAH AND THE AMIR ARE INTELLIGENT AND HAVE REMAINED COOL THROUGHOUT THE CRISIS, SADDAM HAS NOT. HE ONLY KNOWS ONE LANGUAGE, THE LANGUAGE OF FORCE. THE PROBLEM IS HE THINKS HE CAN GET AWAY WITH USING IT.

¶4. (C) CITING THE VISIT OF IRAQI INTERIOR MINISTER SAMIR ABDULWAHHAB TO BAHRAIN AND QATAR JULY 24, THE SOURCE SAID HE EXPECTED FURTHER IRAQI "ULTIMATUMS" TO KUWAIT TO BE DELIVERED THROUGH OTHER GULF STATES. THOUGH IRAQI PRESSURE IS CONTINUING, HE ASSERTED THAT MOST KUWAITIS, INCLUDING HIMSELF, ARE REMAINING CONCERNED YET CALM. OLDER KUWAITIS REMEMBER THAT KUWAIT WEATHERED QASIM'S RANTINGS OVER THE BORDER IN 1961-63; YOUNGER KUWAITIS HAVE PLACED THEIR CONFIDENCE IN THE AMIR AND SHAIKH SABAH; AND EVERYONE HAS "AN ALMOST RELIGIOUS CONVICTION" THAT SADDAM'S DAYS ARE NUMBERED. THE GENERAL FEELING, HE SAID, IS THAT "KUWAIT WILL BE HERE TOMORROW, SADDAM MIGHT NOT."

15. (C) KUWAIT UNIVERSITY POLITICAL SCIENCE PROFESSOR DR. ABDULLAH AL-SHAYJI, A FORMER POLICY ADVISOR TO THE KUWAITI DEFENSE MINISTRY, TOLD EMBOFFS JULY 25 THAT KUWAITIS ARE GENERALLY CONFIDENT THAT THIS CRISIS WILL PASS. THE TALK IN THE DIWANIYAS IS THAT KUWAIT WILL LIKELY GIVE SADDAM SOME OF THE CASH HE WANTS, AS WELL AS PROMISES ON OIL POLICY, BUT NOT AN INCH ON THE BORDER. AL-SHAYJI ASSERTED THIS WOULD PLACATE SADDAM, FOR NOW. ASKED IF GIVING INTO THE IRAQIS ON MONEY DEMANDS WOULD PUT KUWAIT ON A "SLIPPERY SLOPE" OF TENSIONS WITH IRAQ, AL-SHAYJI SMILED AND SAID "IT'S TOO LATE, WE'VE BEEN SLIDING FOR YEARS NOW. KUWAIT'S A SMALL COUNTRY. WE HAVE TO ACCEPT BEING PUSHED AROUND A LITTLE, ESPECIALLY IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD."

16. (C) AL-SHAYJI NOTED THAT SADDAM'S EFFORTS TO MANIPULATE THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION IN KUWAIT WERE A THROWBACK TO 1938, WHEN IRAQ PRESSURED AMIR AHMED AL-JABER, THE PRESENT AMIR'S FATHER, TO ACCEPT A PRO-ARAB-NATIONALIST ELECTED COUNCIL. THE 1938 COUNCIL LASTED A FEW MONTHS BUT SADDAM'S ATTEMPTS HAD NOT EVEN GOTTEN OFF THE GROUND. ACCORDING TO AL-SHAYJI, A GROUP OF KUWAITI LEFTISTS HAD REFUSED AN INVITATION EARLIER IN THE WEEK TO FLY TO BAGHDAD AND PUBLICLY MEET WITH SADDAM. "THEY'RE NOT THAT STUPID," AL-SHAYJI ADDED.

17. (U) THE CALM MOOD IN THE COUNTRY WAS REFLECTED IN THE KUWAITI CABINET'S JULY 22 STATEMENT, WHICH EXPRESSED SATISFACTION WITH THE POSITION OF OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES ON THE DISPUTE AND WITH THE LEADERSHIP'S EFFORTS TO CONTAIN IT THROUGH MEDIATION EFFORTS WITHIN "THE ARAB HOUSE."

18. (U) NUMEROUS KUWAITI SOCIETIES AND ORGANIZATIONS HAVE PAID PERSONAL CALLS ON OR WRITTEN LETTERS TO THE LEADERSHIP EXPRESSING FULL SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO RESOLVE THE DISPUTE. MOST NOTABLY, KUWAIT'S CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY JULY 24 ISSUED A STATEMENT, SIGNED BY CCI CHAIRMAN ABDULAZIZ AL-SAGER, CALLING FOR CONTAINMENT OF THE KUWAIT-IRAQ DISPUTE THROUGH NEGOTIATION AND AVOIDING INCLUSION OF "FOREIGN CIRCLES" (I.E., NON-ARABS) IN SETTLING THE DISPUTE. THE STATEMENT EMPHASIZED THAT "THE KUWAITI PEOPLE FULLY STAND BEHIND THEIR AMIR AND THE CROWN PRINCE, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE SOVEREIGNTY OF KUWAIT IS IN QUESTION."

19. (C) COMMENT. WHILE THE FOCUS OF DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS SHIFTS TO JEDDAH, KUWAITIS CONTINUE TO EXPRESS THEIR CONFIDENCE IN AND SUPPORT OF THE GOVERNMENT. THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE STATEMENT IS ESPECIALLY HELPFUL TO THE LEADERSHIP AT THIS TIME BECAUSE IT IS SIGNED BY AL-SAGER, THE WELL-RESPECTED DE FACTO HEAD OF THE POWERFUL SUNNI MERCHANT COMMUNITY. AFTER LEADING A MERCHANT FAMILY BOYCOTT OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS IN JUNE, AL-SAGER'S LETTER OF SUPPORT IS PERHAPS THE BEST EXAMPLE YET OF HOW SADDAM'S VITRIOL HAS BEEN RECEIVED HERE. END COMMENT.

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